

*13Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. 28As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. 30When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" 33That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" 35Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

I was in the middle of nowhere – on a ribbon of asphalt that followed the contours of the land on which cattle and sheep grazed. Five miles before I had passed through Prairie City, South Dakota, a collection of five or ten shacks, some occupied, some not. Out on that empty prairie were scattered a few houses, a one room school with its swings and basketball hoop, a tree or two. The next town ahead was Newell, a town of maybe two hundred people but Newell was fifty or sixty miles down the road. Until I arrived there cattle and sheep, deer and antelope, and gophers would be my only companions or so I thought. But suddenly so near I could almost touch it rose a bird larger than any I had ever seen on the wing – a golden eagle – startled by my passing, rising from the ditch to soar above. Oh, it was a special moment – I never passed that way again without remembering – hoping that moment would be repeated. It never was.

Jesus after his resurrection was as elusive as an eagle. Momentary glimpses, a word or phrase, sometimes a little teaching –then gone. A few times he shared fish – bread – but he would not be held or enshrined. Often when his followers were gathered he appeared, but not always. Sometimes it was to one or two he made himself known – once he blinded one intent on destroying his church and made a believer out of him, but always Jesus appeared when and where he chose. And then he vanished.

Today we have the story of one appearance of Jesus to two of his followers – one a man named Cleopas – the other not named – we do not even know whether the other was a man or a woman. The two were on their way to the village of Emmaus, talking as they went. Suddenly they were joined by a stranger who asked about their conversation. Cleopas said to him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” Then he told him of Jesus, how they had hoped that he was the one to free Israel and how their hopes were destroyed with Jesus’ crucifixion.

My guess is that some of us are a lot like those two. We thought Jesus would be the answer. You know, I attend church each week, I say my prayers faithfully every day, and Jesus will keep my family safe – guard them from wrong doing – help me overcome all the sins and weaknesses that drag me down. But then my child gets sick or fights with his brother. My husband gets cancer – my sister can’t control her drinking – my son is sent to Iraq. I pray to Jesus even more. But for some of us the one we love does not get well, is not kept safe, even though we pray we find we cannot overcome our fears, our failings, our addictions. And we become as without hope as those two walking with the stranger that day.

One thing we know about those two that day – they were not talking about the weather. Though Jesus had been crucified he was still in their hearts and their minds.

In that they were again like so many of us. When our hopes are dashed, when the very things we feared have happened, I have noticed how you and I seek more than ever to understand God and what God has been

doing. So when the stranger spoke to them about the Messiah and taught them from the scriptures they were eager to listen.

When they came to Emmaus, the stranger was continuing on down the road but they invited him to stay with them. And he did. And as they sat at table and this stranger took the role of the host and blessed and broke the bread suddenly they knew he was Jesus. And he was gone. More quickly than my eagle disappeared, he was gone.

We humans like to build shrines, and create rituals, ways, I think, that we would try to capture God, cage God, keep God here. But Jesus appears and disappears when and where he will.

Now if I wanted to see an eagle again I would go where eagles have appeared. I would watch and wait.

That is what we do here each week, watch and wait. We trust that in the word that is read and preached and sung, and in the meal that is shared the Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth will be known. We trust that the only Son of God, Jesus Christ, will through his Spirit give us what we need. If your experience is like mine – in some moments you are startled by Jesus here.

And some weeks feel like mostly watching and waiting.

But for those two who recognized him that night a faith was raised up in them. Though Jesus vanished from their sight his words did not vanish. They raced the seven miles back to Jerusalem that very night to tell of Jesus, alive.

And through the centuries since the church of Jesus Christ has gathered around the scriptures and gathered for the meal, confident that the living Jesus would be encountered in these. Though the hopes so many had for Israel were never realized and the hopes you and I have dreamed for our lives most often are not realized either – Jesus nourishes us with an enduring hope, a living hope, a hope that cannot be destroyed. Though all your hopes and dreams pass away your Lord is alive in you through the gift of faith. And you shall be alive in him forevermore.

